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FROST HAS COME EARLY FOR THE CGIAR'S MUCH-AWAITED SYSTEMWIDE REVIEW

Frustrated Harvest

AFTER 17 YEARS - A 17 DAY WONDER? NOW THE QUESTION IS, WHAT NEXT?

In search of vindication and vision, the CGIAR's first Systemwide Review in 17 years is indeed a vociferous defence of the past but its recommendations for the future vacuous and doomed to be discounted. After 18 months and \$1.5 million is the System back where it started? How will it recover from its post-harvest losses?

This year, the 16 International Agricultural Research Centres and the more than 40 donor-members of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) will spend about US\$325 million on research on world food security. Thus, the CGIAR is the world's largest agricultural science network solely devoted to fighting hunger. That's why the network's just-completed Systemwide Review - the first since 1981 - is a hot topic from the rice terraces of Mindanao to the Altiplano potato fields of Bolivia. When Centres and donors discuss the report at the World Bank building in Washington (October 26-30) the CGIAR's evaluation will either reshape the way in which scientists conduct agricultural research - or entrench the status quo.

Half-Hearted Harvest: The betting has to be on the status quo. Not that the report prepared by a 9-member blue-ribbon panel (chaired by Maurice Strong of Rio Earth Summit fame) is not a ringing endorsement of agricultural research and CGIAR. Warning that policy-makers have become complacent about global food production, the panel stresses that population growth and climate change are threatening future food availability even as crop yields are stagnating. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are particularly vulnerable and, according to the panel, there is urgent need to adopt advanced new biotechnologies and to partner with the private sector in order to avert future famines.

But the sombre warnings of pending problems are little more than a watered-down replay of the 1996 World Food Summit and even the biotech hype comes off half-hearted. The report's other scientific mantra, the internet and the potential for distance-learning seems disturbingly trite for a scientific network that prides itself on being "cutting-edge."

Two Legs - No Gonads: The panel considers revolutionary its call for a two legged research agenda: Integrated Gene Management (IGM); and Integrated Natural Resource Management (NRM). IGM means biotechnology. The new twist here is that the report is pressing the CGIAR to go full speed ahead with research on controversial GMOs (Genetically-Modified Organisms, aka transgenic plants and animals). The second leg - Natural Resource Management - includes everything from desertification to irrigation, farming systems, and the particular needs of resource-poor women farmers. The two legs are joined at their gene banks - the vital, unsung work of the CGIAR to conserve crop and livestock breeding stock. Happily, the report acknowledges that CGIAR needs to devote more time and energy to in situ (on-farm) genetic conservation.

Recognizing that biotechnology and genetic resource issues have heavy implications for intellectual property, the role of multinational agribusiness, and the fate of public sector science, the report calls for a variety of taskforces to study its proposals further. Indeed, among the 111 pages and 29 recommendations, there are no fewer than 186 references to the need for policy research and policy dialogues.

The Policy Role - Pro-Passive: So manifest is the need for policy dialogue, the report proposes to entrench policy capacity-building in the CGIAR's mandate along with sustainable food security and poverty eradication. The report calls upon International Centres to become advocates for the poor. Saying this, however, the panel actually advocates in favour of agribusiness proposing a high-level meeting with corporate CEOs to discuss partnership modalities and arguing that the CGIAR should take a profit-oriented approach to patents on its research products. The private sector should also be given seats on a new Super-Board

proposed by the panel within a new legal entity also proposed in the report. Armed with this pro-corporate policy perspective, the CGIAR is to sally forth and train policymakers in the South to adopt similar practices.

Yet, when it comes to the "crunch" pro-poor issues like the inalienable right of farmers to save and exchange seed - and opposition to the widely condemned Terminator Technology (suicide seeds that cannot regenerate) propagated by a Monsanto subsidiary, the report merrily notes the controversy but does not advocate support for poor farmers. The contradiction has shocked many of the CGIAR's government contributors and infuriated civil society organizations and farmers.

Post-Harvest Losses: Sadly, the first Systemwide Review in seventeen years has barely lasted seventeen days. Within days of the tabling of the report on September 30th donor consortia in several regions were in touch via e-mail and through face to face encounters. By October 17th, it was clear that the report's major recommendations: the move to the right and to the private sector; the new legal entity; the Super-Board; and the "patents for profit" theme were all dead in the water. The overall response from donors ranged from disappointment to disgust. Frustration runs particularly high among European Governments (who provide 44% of the budget) that the panel has dodged the really tough bullet of centre consolidations. Indeed, many donors were incensed that the panel offered them obviously unacceptable recommendations without providing reasoned arguments or alternative scenarios. Many donors feel that some of the sixteen international centres have outlived their usefulness or need drastic reorganization. One page of the report skirts around this issue only expressing general sympathy for the need to consolidate. With less than a week to go before the CGIAR's members come together in Washington, some governments are turning their attention to face-saving measures that would allow the panel to present its report and leave without more embarrassment.

Shaping the CGIAR's Future: That a frail and hasty report has been successfully shelved should give little comfort. The Systemwide Review was conducted for a reason. The CGIAR continues to be faced with problems of policy, direction, and funding that will not go away. The most urgent need now is for a range of realistic options that can be considered over the next six months. In discussions with a wide range of parties, for example, it is clear that several CGIAR members might support the following positions ...

1. **Policy:** The panel was right to identify a wide range of policy problems. However, such problems need not be resolved through centralization or the creation of a new legal instrument. Existing informal structures will suffice.

(a) For example, the new Global (and Regional) Fora on Agricultural Research (GFAR) could be expanded to include agricultural and rural development. The fora could meet alternate years (globally on odd years; regionally on even years) and could be open to the whole range of programme and policy discussion proposed in the report.

(b) Secondly, the CGIAR could participate actively - as one party to - informal policy consultations such as the Crucible Group (for intellectual property) in order to find resolutions to existing policy concerns and to maintain an ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders on new issues and developments.

(c) Further, the CGIAR could strengthen its own policy and policy-monitoring capacity at a Centre (possibly IPGRI - close to TAC and FAO) and so merging theory with reality.

(d) Intellectual Property is a constraint to scientific research. (Beyond this statement there is no agreement.)

(e) Finally, to indicate its pro-poor, pro-farmer perspective, the CGIAR could clearly state that it will never use Terminator Technology and that it wholeheartedly supports the right of poor farming communities to maintain their customs and traditions in saving and exchanging seed without restriction.

2. **Governance:** The current structure of (non-profit) member sovereignty and centre autonomy should be maintained with the following changes:

(a) Centres could consolidate on a geo-political basis. The regions could be: Southeast Asia (IRRI); South Asia (ICRISAT minus its African sub-Centre); West Asia - North Africa (ICARDA); Sub-Saharan Africa (focussed on ICRISAT's sub-Centre) ; Highland Latin America (CIP); Tropical and Sub-Tropical Latin America/Caribbean (CIMMYT). Some Centres will continue to offer inter-regional support (ie. ICLARM, ICRAF, etc.) for some commodities or technologies but they will still be governed within their own regional context.

(b) ISNAR should close with its work undertaken, instead, through the new regional Centres). A special taskforce could consider the division of program and policy work between IFPRI and IPGRI. It is likely that WARDA in West Africa and IIMI in South Asia would cease to exist.

(c) The Boards of Trustees of the new regional Centres could be comprised equally of NARS members elected within the region and non-regional members appointed by the CGIAR.

(d) CGIAR funding for each region could be based upon the same terms and conditions as today except that there should be no assumption that all of the funds would be spent directly by the Centre itself. Essentially, the Centre would facilitate the research agenda of each region and work with each region to determine where and how research should be supported. Research contracts could be out-sourced to non-region Centres and others as deemed necessary.

(e) CGIAR membership criteria could include either funds (variable minimal levels according to GDP) or in-kind contributions. Each region/centre would also have representation. Farmers' organizations and rural civil society organizations could be invited to participate regionally and globally through the new Centres and the GFAR.

(f) Systemwide decision-making should arise from an active, informal, dialogue between members and centres with an emphasis on consensus management supported by (where necessary) facilitated dialogue and participatory processes. Where such mechanisms fail, members and centres may choose to make their own decisions.

3. **Science:** The two legs are not best described as gene management and resource management but as lab science and land science. New informatics and other technologies should be used to ensure an equal partnership among conventional institutional innovation systems and community cooperative innovation systems. Other elements of a new approach to science include:

(a) The research vision should be set by the small, revised global Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) together with regional/centre TACs in dialogue with NARS and other stakeholders.

(b) The degree to which centres work "upstream" or "downstream" will depend upon defined regional needs;

(c) The inclusion of new fields of research (ie. Hidden Harvest, post-harvest; urban farming; other livestock; wider biodiversity, etc.) will also be determined regionally and informed by wider CGIAR and TAC discussions.

(d) All centres will be expected to work with the most proven, effective, and safest technologies to meet their goals. Centres should investigate new technologies but should decide to apply new technologies as warranted and under the highest conditions of environmental, health, and socio-economic safety. The proposed use of any new technology should be widely discussed at the regional level and subject to careful public scrutiny and continued monitoring.

Clearer of all in the turmoil surrounding the release of the panel's report is the feeling expressed by many donors that they want to be offered well-argued choices. It could well be that the time period between next week's Washington meeting and the CGIAR's regular Mid-term Meeting next May will see a number of taskforces rushing to construct those alternative scenarios. Work which might have been expected to have been completed by the review panel.*

For further information, please see RAFI's home page at <http://www.rafi.org>. A full text version of the review panel's report is available along with the RAFI Translator - a blow-by-blow analysis of the report and its recommendations.

* The panel made a sincere and genuine attempt to engage a wide range of viewpoints in a short period of time. In particular, the panel's Chair, Maurice Strong, consulted widely and personally intervened to seek advice from CGIAR critics. RAFI's Pat Mooney was a member of the review panel's sub-panel on science and strategy. However, the timing and pace of drafting prevented several sub-panellists, including Pat Mooney, from seeing either draft or final recommendations.